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ABSTRACT

This paper presents research on school-aged children's thinking about various issues pertaining to peer relations. The research presented concerns studies derived from Turiel's (1983) theory of domains of social reasoning. Studies covered focus on: (1) children's and adolescents' reasoning about friendships; (2) adolescents' thinking about peers' expected friendship behavior and peer influence; and (3) children's conceptions of active responses which would be made by peers who witnessed rule violations by same-age peers. Findings were consistent in showing that children and adolescents consider the social context or domain when they evaluate issues concerning peer relations, including the regulation of friendships, peer influence, and peers' active responses to others' rule violations. In general, school-aged children's evaluations are based on their understanding of the characteristics associated with various kinds of social events. It is concluded that the research illustrates that the domain-specificity approach can be useful in investigations of children's conceptions of various areas of social and cognitive functioning. (RH)

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The Influence of Social Rules on Children's and Adolescents' Concepts of Peer Relations

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The Influence of Social Rules on Children's and Adolescents' Concepts of Peer Relations

In this paper we will present research on school-aged children's thinking about different issues pertinent to peer relations. One research topic will address children's and adolescents' reasoning about friendships via the assessment of their thinking about authority. A second topic pertains to adolescents' thinking about peers' expected friendship behavior and their thinking about peer influence. The third research issue concerns children's conceptions of peers' active responses when witnessing rule violations of same-age peers. The research to be presented follows from Turiel's (1983) theory of domains of social reasoning.

A number of studies have demonstrated that children distinguish among domains of social knowledge on a variety of conceptual and behavioral dimensions. These domains include (1) morality which refers to welfare, justice, and rights, (2) social conventions which pertain to prescribed behaviors defined by constituted systems, and (3) personal issues which involve actions primarily affecting the actor. The research (Siegel & Storey, 1985; Smetana, 1981; Tisak, 1989), using Turiel's model, has shown that not only are young children able to differentiate among types of social events, but that children's appreciation for moral rules appears at a much earlier age than Piaget (1932/1965) and others (Kohlberg, 1969; Rest, 1983) had predicted.

We believe that the domain-specificity approach can be useful in enhancing other research areas of social cognitive functioning besides morality. One such area is children's thinking about authority. Although parents have immense power over a child, it has been demonstrated that children do not have an unilateral respect for parental rules. Children consider certain rules to be beyond the boundaries of authority. For example, the jurisdiction of authority does not extend to commands that cause harm (Damon, 1977) or to commands that fail to prevent harm (Laupta & Turiel, 1986). Children also regard certain actions which primarily affect the actor, such as the regulation of friendships, to be outside parental control (Nucci, 1981; Smetana, 1988; Tisak, 1986).

The research that will be presented in this first part was designed to probe the limits of children's reasoning about the legitimacy of parental prohibitions on friendship choice. The domain model was used to investigate children's reasoning about friendships which is a significant component of successful peer relations. In doing so, we were able to assess children's thinking about friendships by examining their reasoning about authority. Results of previous research suggest that children consider the characteristics of the social event when evaluating issues pertaining to authority (Davidson, Turiel, & Black, 1983; Weston & Turiel, 1980; Tisak, 1986). Given these findings it was expected that children would regard the regulation of friendships to

be within parental jurisdiction for particular parental justifications even though friendship choice, per se, is considered a personal issue.

Thus, one of the goals of this research was to examine whether the friendship rule would be legitimate when parents justified its existence due to the particular behavior of the peer. The questions posed to subjects were referred to as inhibitory dimensions (Tisak, 1986; Tisak & Ford, 1986). For one of the questions, subjects were asked whether it would be legitimate for parents to make a rule prohibiting a friendship because of the peer's behavior.

Three types of parental justifications were used: justifications based on moral acts, for example a peer stealing money. There were also justifications which concerned the safety of the actor. These events were referred to as prudential acts and an example includes the peer running out in the street without looking. There were also personal acts which did not directly concern harm or safety, for example, the peer not dressing neatly. We also included another rule in which the parents regulated the friendship but gave no reason for doing so. The purpose of including this latter rule was to assess whether children believe that parents have to provide a justification in order for the friendship rule to be legitimate.

In summary, by adding the additional component to the friendship regulation question, we were able to examine

whether children base their evaluations on the particular reason parents give for the friendship rule.

The subjects were 120 children from the 2nd, 4th, and 6th grades. The results are graphically displayed under study 1. When the peer was involved in moral or prudential transgressions most children (average 85%) stated that it would be all right for parents to regulate their children's friendships. However, significantly fewer 6th graders than the 2nd and 4th graders gave this response X^2 (1) = 11.9, $p < .001$ for morality and prudential reasons, X^2 (1) = 24.9, $p < .001$. Moreover, significantly fewer 6th graders gave the affirmative response to parents' prudential reasons in comparison to parents' moral justifications. A different pattern of findings was obtained when parents provided personal reasons for the rule or when parents failed to provide a justification. In these cases, almost all children (average 88%) indicated that parents do not have a right to regulate a friendship.

Children were also asked to justify their evaluations. The overall justifications children gave in support of parental rules regulating the friendship for moral and prudential reasons concerned the welfare and safety of the child. For example, in reference to the moral reasons, children stated that the child might be a potential victim; that is, the friend might hit her also. In supporting their negative evaluations, especially with regard to parents'

personal reasons and when parents failed to provide a rationale for the friendship rule, children stated that the acts would not have any effect on the child. They also indicated that it was the child's prerogative to choose his/her own friends.

These results suggest that children consider the social context when evaluating issues pertaining to authority and friendships. The findings also show that although the friendship rule itself is evaluated as a personal issue by children, as demonstrated by previous research (Nucci, 1981; Smetana, 1988; Tisak, 1986), when the rule encompasses moral or prudential components, it is these latter factors that become the basis of children's judgments. However, the findings also suggest that the prudential factors were less important for the 6th graders than for the younger children. It seems that with increasing age, children begin to focus more on the personal aspects of the friendship rule than on the prudential concerns.

A similar study based on the domain model was conducted with adolescents. A number of researchers, including Montemayor (1983), Smetana, (1988), and Youniss and Smollar (1985), have pointed out that the increase in parent-child conflict during adolescence may be the result of divergent thinking on the part of parents and adolescents on what constitutes a legitimate rule. This issue may be especially salient when the conflict revolves around the regulation of

friendships. During the period of adolescence, relations with parents begin to change and relations with peers become more intensified (Hartup, 1983). Hence, it may be important to utilize different types of events to assess adolescents' conceptions of parental regulations of friendships.

As in the previous research, subjects in this second study were asked whether it would be legitimate for parents to regulate a friendship because of the peer's behavior. However, in the present study, the peers were involved in substance use. The specific events included marijuana use, alcohol consumption, specifically beer, and cigarette smoking.

We decided to use drugs since there is a growing concern about school-aged children's use of drugs. In fact, the National Institute on Drug Abuse report of 1987, which was based on a sample of over 15,000 high school students (Johnson, Bachman, & O'Malley, 1987), indicated that nearly 60% of the seniors reported illicit drug use at some time in their lives. However, a substantial proportion of the subjects have used only marijuana. High school students also reported that beer was the predominant alcoholic beverage consumed. The report also indicated that for all three drugs, cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana, most subjects' initial experiences took place prior to the 9th grade.

Due to the findings reported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, as well as results from other research (Berndt, 1979, 1982; Brook, Whiteman, & Gordon, 1983; Keyes & Block, 1984), we decided to select 9th and 12th graders as our subjects. There were 82 adolescents divided equally into the younger or older groups. Also due to previous findings, we decided to utilize the domain model to examine whether adolescents differentiate among the three types of substance use, cigarettes, beer, and marijauana, when evaluating the regulation of friendships.

As expected, the results suggested main effects for drug type (X^2 (2) = 38.12, $p < .001$) and age (X^2 (1) = 11.10, $p < .001$). The graph for study 2 shows subjects' responses by drug type. The majority of adolescents (average 73%) stated that it would be legitimate for parents to regulate a friendship if the peer smoked marijuana. Significantly fewer adolescents gave this response when the peer drank alcohol (X^2 (1) = 15.80, $p < .001$), and very few affirmative responses, only 38%, were given when the peer smoked cigarettes. The results also showed that for each event, older adolescents gave fewer affirmative responses than did the younger subjects.

In supporting their affirmative responses, adolescents discussed the effects the drugs would have on the peer. For example, they stated that the individual could become a potential victim through his/her association with the

friend.

Although there are explicit laws regulating the events used in this study, especially the use of marijuana, it was surprising that adolescents rarely referred to the existence of a law in supporting their affirmative judgments. It seems that the regulation of these events was not the salient feature in adolescent's evaluations. In fact, adolescents instead focused on the negative consequences that the peer might experience through his or her association with the friend.

The purpose of the third study was to examine whether adolescents' evaluations of peers' expected behavior and peers' influence would be drug specific. The subjects were 25 adolescents from the 9th and 10th grades and 38 adolescents from the 11th and 12th grades. Subjects were asked whether the friendship would be terminated if the friend continued to violate the rules regulating marijuana use, alcohol consumption, and cigarette smoking. Subjects were also asked whether a peer would model or be influenced by the friend's behavior. We predicted that adolescents evaluations would be drug specific. The findings supported this hypothesis. The results indicated significant main effects for drug type for both questions (X^2 (2) = 89.08, $p < .001$ for expected peer behavior and X^2 (2) = 15.59, $p < .001$ for peer influence). These findings are displayed under study 3. For the question referred to as expected

friendship behavior, the majority of adolescents (average 90%) believed that a person would remain friends even if the peer continued to drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes. However, only 40% gave this response when the friend continued to smoke marijuana (X^2 (1) = 86.33, $p < .001$). When asked if the person would be influenced by the friend's behavior, only 44% of the subjects believed that a person would be influenced by the friend smoking marijuana or smoking cigarettes. In contrast to these two acts, significantly more adolescents, specifically 82%, indicated that a peer would start drinking alcohol if their friend continued this behavior, X^2 (1) = 15.06, $p < .001$.

Although there is a continuing controversy over the issue of peer influence (Brown, 1982; Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986; Clausen & Brown, 1985; Glynn, 1981; Huba & Bentler, 1980; Kandel, Kessler, & Margulies, 1978; Krosnack & Judd, 1982; Tudor, Peterson, & Elifson, 1980), there is evidence to suggest that adolescents are often influenced more by close friends than by other peers (Berndt, 1986). The results of the latter study coincides with some of the conclusions draw by Berndt (Berndt, 1989), indicating that the peer influence may also be event-specific.

The findings discussed thus far suggest that children and adolescents consider the social context when evaluating peer issues such as the regulation of friendships and peer influence.

The research that will be presented in this next part utilizes the domain model to address a different aspect of children's thinking about peer relations. In particular, we will be presenting research which has assessed the question of children's thinking about the active role children should play in response to witnessing rule violations on the part of an associate.

Recent data suggest that children's reasoning about the role peers should play when witnessing others' behaviors may be a function of the content of the social rule. For example, Tisak (1986) found that children consider the response of reporting a moral transgression to an authority as appropriate and legitimate. However, this response was not acceptable when a child violated either a conventional or personal rule.

In the first study that was discussed, children in grades 2, 4, and 6 were also asked questions about whether a peer should respond in some manner when witnessing a friend's direct moral, prudential, and personal behaviors. For heuristic purposes, these results are illustrated under study 4. Most children (average 96%) indicated that a peer should respond to a friend's moral and prudential behaviors. In contrast, very few children (average 19%) stated that a peer should respond to a friend's personal acts χ^2 (2) = 62.4, $p < .001$.

In study 1, the older children were more likely than the younger ones to indicate that prudential behaviors were not valid reasons to regulate a friendship. The findings in this latter part, however, suggest that children may, evaluate a friend's prudential behaviors as serious or unacceptable and therefore judge that some action should be taken. At the same time they seem to recognize that these behaviors mainly affect oneself and thus are not valid reasons for regulating a friendship.

Children who indicated that peers have an obligation to respond were asked to specify the type of action that would be appropriate. There were two major response categories: (a) report the incident to an authority, and (b) discuss the incident with the friend. The results are presented under study 4. There were no significant differences in children's judgments of the appropriate action required in reference to the moral transgressions. Responses to both categories were almost equal. The results for the moral transgressions are consistent with those reported in previous research showing that either response is appropriate for moral transgressions (Tisak, 1986; Tisak & Ford, 1986). For prudential acts, there was a significant difference in the response category used. The majority of children (average 78%) indicated that the peer should talk to the friend, and very few children, only 20%, stated that the appropriate response would be to report the incident to an authority, X^2 (1) = 54.4, $p < .001$).

These results suggest that depending on the social domain, children seem to view particular responses as being more appropriate when observing a friend's transgression directly. Children seem to recognize that it may be more important to expeditiously respond to a friend's prudential act than report the behavior to an authority, since the consequences of the act may have an immediate effect on the child (Schweder, Turiel, & Much, 1981). Further, these findings are consistent with previous research by Dodge and Frame (1982), and by Tisak (Tisak, 1986; Tisak & Ford, 1986), who found that children are more inclined to report an aggressive act than a nonaggressive one to an authority.

The research on children's reasoning about the active dimension has focused primarily on peer's prescribed behaviors, that is what a peer should do. However, there is evidence (Sobesky, 1983; Tisak & Turiel, 1988), suggesting that for other types of peer behavior, such as committing a rule violation, children differentiate between a peer's expected behavior, what a peer would do and their prescribed behavior.

In the fifth study, children in the 4th, 6th, and 8th grades were asked a series of questions including whether a peer would respond to a witnessed transgression. The transgressions included moral and prudential rule violations. Thus one aim of the study was to examine whether children consider the domain of the rule when

evaluating the active expected response of a peer. Research has also shown that children distinguish among different kinds of peer relations, such as, friends and acquaintances (Berndt & Perry, 1986; Furman & Bierman, 1984). The second aim of the study was to investigate whether children's evaluations of peers' active responses are influenced by the domain of the rule as well as the relationship between the witness and the perpetrator. That is, we assessed children's evaluations of the witness' response when the perpetrator was either a sibling, friend, or nonfriend.

There were significant grade differences, $F(2,105) = 11.6$, $p < .001$. With increasing age, fewer children stated that peers would respond to a peer's transgression. The results also showed that there was significant interaction between relationship and domain, $F(4,102)=17.18$, $p < .001$. The data are presented under study 5. Subjects stated that children would respond when a peer was involved in a moral transgression, regardless of the peer relation, although their reasons for responding did differ according to the type of relationship. For example, when the perpetrator was a sibling or friend, children referred to punishment avoidance in additon to being concerned about the welfare of the victim. When the instigator was a nonfriend, children stated the individual deserved punishment. Children also indicted that a peer would respond to a sibling's or friend's prudential behavior but would not respond when the non-friend was involved in a prudential act.

In conclusion, the research that was presented illustrates that the domain-specificity approach can be useful in investigating children's conceptions of different areas of social-cognitive functioning. The findings were consistent in showing that children and adolescents consider the social context or social domain when evaluating different issues pertaining to peer relations, including the regulation of friendships, peer influence, and peers' active responses to others' rule violations. In general, this reserch has shown that school-aged children's evaluations are based on their understanding of the particular characteristics associated with different kinds of social events.

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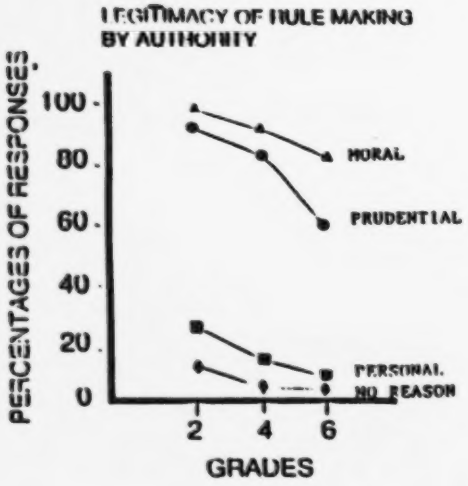
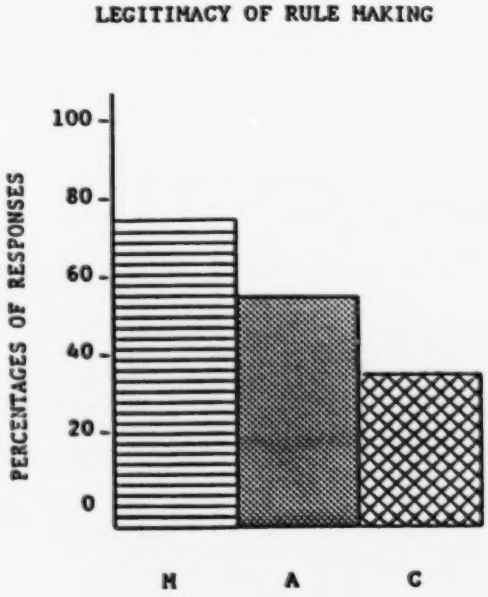
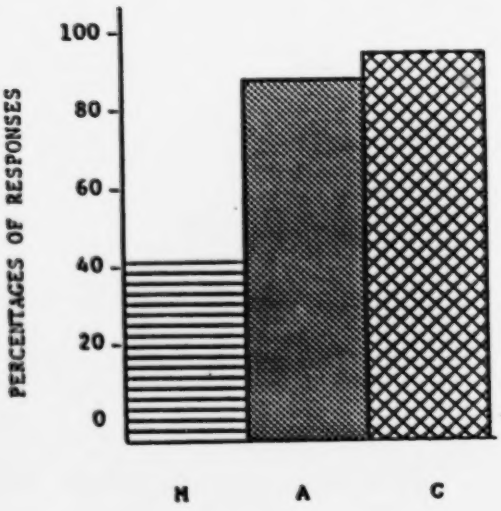
Study 1: Regulation of Friendships
Young Children



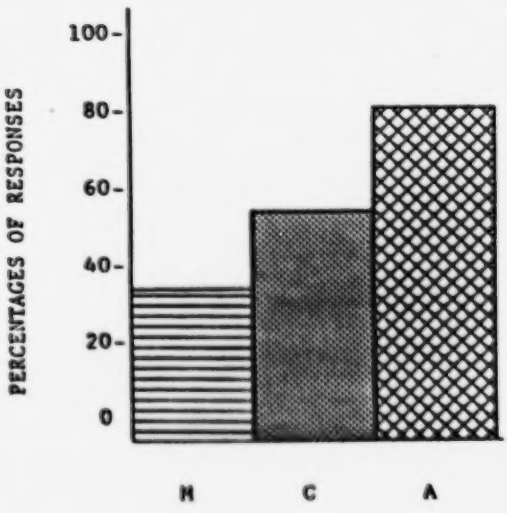
Study 2: Regulation of Friendships
Adolescents



Study 3: Expected Friendship Behavior
Adolescents



Peer Influence
Adolescents

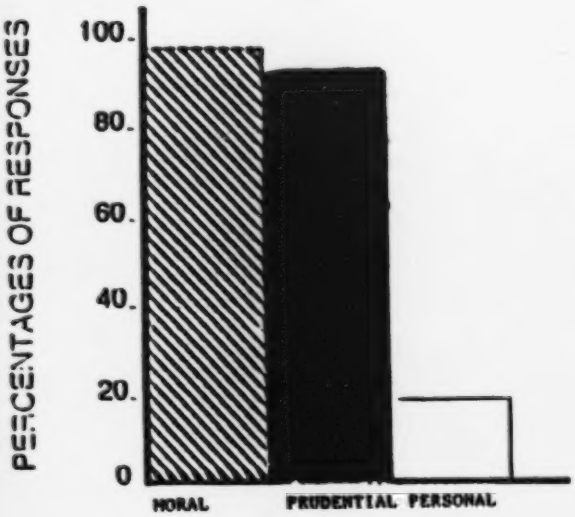


M - MARIJUANA

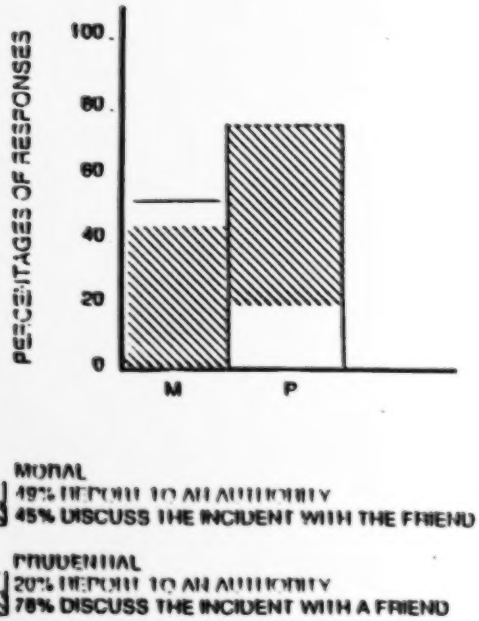
A - ALCOHOL

C - CIGARETTES

Study 4: Obligation to Respond to a Friend's Act
Young Children



Appropriate Action Required
Young Children



Study 5: Expected Behavioral Response
Children: 4th, 6th, & 8th Grades

	Moral	Prudential
Sibling	1.57 (.67)	1.26 (.80)
Friend	1.32 (.82)	1.35 (.80)
Nonfriend	1.63 (.66)	.64 (.81)

Note.- The means presented are the nontransformed scores; the nontransformed standard deviations are in parentheses.